Ironclads

* Steam propelled warship fitted with iron armor plates
* Ironclads of 1800s led to warships we know today
* Shipbuilders began to experiment with iron instead of wood
* Iron hull didn’t make ship ironclad, there were ironclads with wooden hulls
* Example: contrast between passenger cars and tanks, car defenseless, tank strong
* Most common ironclads were casemate ironclads and monitors
* Casemate was armored box built to protect guns and crew
* A lot of ironclads on both sides were casemates
* Southern ironclads also had strong sharp bows to ram and sink ships, so often called “rams”
* Monitor was low-freeboard steamship with small number of heavy guns within turret
* Low-freeboard means deck very close to water
* First ironclads built by French Navy to attack enemy forts in Crimean War, 1850s
* Britain and France started to build ironclads for ship-to-ship combat, as well
* First fight of ironclads was *USS Monitor* and *CSS Virginia* at Hampton Roads, Virginia, March 9 1862
* Also ironclads on Mississippi River, very different from monitors and rams on coasts, often riverboats with cabins and other civilian fixings removed, with armor and a heavy cannon
* Confederacy used most of their ironclads to defend harbors and rivers – one ironclad can defeat many wooden, most North ships wooden
* Union used ironclads to actively fight Southern ironclads and to bombard Southern forts, etc. – Because of this, Northern ironclads moved a lot more than Southern ones
* *USS Monitor* sank in a storm while moving from Hampton Roads toward coast of North Carolina
* 3 main reasons ironclads important: 1. Among first ships in world to be armored by metal and powered by steam rather than wind, this led to modern warships – ironclads almost “great-grandparents” of modern ships. 2. Civil War major American history, naval war often forgotten but still big – ironclads big part

3. Ironclads very far ahead of their time

From <http://users.wowway.com/~jenkins/ironclads/ironintr.htm>

* USS *Monitor* was a 987-ton armored turret gunboat
* Built in New York to design of John Ericsson
* *Monitor* was first of a large fleet of ironclads
* Commissioned February 25 1862, first deployment to Hampton Roads, Virginia arrival March 9 1862
* Immediately went into action against CSS *Virginia* which sunk two U.S. Navy ships the previous day
* Battle was a tactical draw, but *Monitor* stopped *Virginia* from taking control of Hampton Roads, preserving Union blockade of Norfolk area
* In mid 1862, *Monitor* deployed along James River in support of Army’s Peninsular Campaign
* Late 1862 *Monitor* ordered south for more operations, caught in major storm of Cape Hatteras, sunk December 31, 1862
* Wreck discovered in 1974, now marine sanctuary
* Work being done to recover major components of structure and machinery, they will be preserved and put on a museum exhibit
* About loss:
* After hot summer day during routine duty in Hampton Roads, *Monitor* needed overhaul
* Overhaul done at Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. – given telescoping smokestack, better ventilation, davits for smaller boats and handful of changes for fighting and habitability
* Returned to combat November 1862, remained near Newport News
* In December, *Monitor* ordered south to join blockade off Carolinas, left Hampton Roads on December 29 being towed by USS *Rhode Island* headed for Beaufort, N.C.
* Weather expected to be good for whole trip, stayed good until 30th, winds and seas picked up and turned to a gale by evening, Monitor was working extremely hard when it neared Cape Hatteras
* Water began to enter ship faster than pumps could put it out, situation deteriorated
* Right before midnight, clear *Monitor* in trouble, steam pressure failed because rising water put out boiler fires
* Tow line cut, anchor dropper, sent distress signals to *Rhode Island*
* *Rhode Island* saved most of the crew, but some swept away by rough seas
* 1:30 AM *Monitor* sank, 16/62 crew lost
* Battle of Hampton Roads:
* Morning March 9 1862 CSS *Virginia* getting ready to fight, day before sank USS *Congress* and USS *Cumberland* sinking both and killing more than 240
* March 9, *Virginia* planned on doing same to USS *Minnesota* and other ships
* South’s plans disrupted when they saw the *Monitor*
* CSS *Virginia* sailed into Hampton Roads, *Monitor* positioned herself to protect *Minnesota*, battle began
* Both ships shot at each other with cannon, tried to ram each other but armor prevailed
* *Virginia*’s smokestack shot away, *Monitor* had technological trouble hindering both eleven-inch guns
* Ammunition supply problems made *Monitor* go into shallower waters*, Virginia* couldn’t follow but *Monitor* protected *Minnesota*
* After noon, *Virginia* focused on *Monitor*’s pilothouse, a shell hit blinded Lt. John L. Worden, C.O. and making him withdraw until he could see
* By the time *Monitor* returned, *Virginia* retreated to Norfolk
* Battle ended in stalemate until *Virginia* self-destructed two months later
* Battle symbolized triumph of industrial-age warfare
* Existing frigates were frowned upon in wake of ironclad success
* As a result, armored warship competition existed into the 1940s

"USN Ships--USS Monitor (1862-1862)." *Naval History and Heritage Command*. U.S. Navy, 27 June 2001. Web. 12 May 2011.

<http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-m/monitor.htm>